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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 DHA-05 IO-13 /085 W
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P R 131500Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3690
INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 7498

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BR
SUBJ: ARMY AND AIR FORCE MINISTERS WARN AGAINST ALLEGED PRESS CAMPAIGNS CONSIDERED DENIGRATING TO ARMED FORCES

1. SUMMARY. IN AN OFFICIAL NOTE PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 9, ARMY MINISTER SYLVIO FROTA SAID HE HAD REQUESTED APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES TO INITIATE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST UNNAMED PUBLICATIONS AND JOURNALISTS WHICH HAD INSTITUTED A "CAMPAIGN OF AGRESSION" AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES. FROTA'S ACTION FOLLOWED BY TWO DAYS A SIMILAR AIR MINISTRY NOTE, AND ALLUDED TO TWO RECENT PRESS ARTICLES CONSIDERED HIGHLY OFFENSIVE TO THE MILITARY. ON SEPTEMBER 10, THE JUSTICE MINISTRY ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD PROSECUTE A SAO PAULO JOURNALIST UNDER THE NATIONAL SECURITY LAW FOR A COMUMN IN WHICH HE MADE DEPRECATORY REFERENCES TO THE DUKE OF CAXIAS, PATRON OF THE BRAZILIAN ARMY. POLITICAL AND PRESS REACTION HAS BEEN CAUTIOUS--A REFLECTION OF GENERAL BUT LARGELY UNSPOKEN RECOGNITION THAT FROTA'S ACTION CONSTITUTED A WARNING TO THE BODY POLITIC, AND TO THE OPPOSITION IN PARTICULAR, TO CONDUCT ITSELF WITHIN BOUNDS CONSIDERED TOLERABLE BY THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND. END SUMMARY.

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2. IN AN OFFICIAL NOTE PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 9, TWO DAYS AFTER BRAZIL'S NATIONAL DAY AND JUST BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER 10 COMMEMORATION OF PRESS DAY, ARMY MINISTER SYLVIO FROTA ISSUED A STRONG WARNING TO JOURNALISTS, PUBLISHERS AND THE READING PUBLIC THAT THE ARMED FORCES WOULD NOT PERMIT WHAT IT CONSTRUES AS CONTINUED ATTACKS ON ITS INTEGRITY AND THE INTEGRITY OF ITS OFFICERS. ALLEGING A "CAMPAIGN OF AGGRESSION

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AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES AND ATTEMPTS TO DISCREDIT THE REVOLUTION," FROTA CHARGED THAT SOME INDIVIDULAS WERE "SEEKING TO DENIGRATE THE REPUTATION OF THE ARMY IN ORDER TO TURN THE NATION AGAINST IT." STAGING THAT THE APPROACH OF THE NATIONAL DAY HAD WITNESSED AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ARTICLES DEFAMING THE MILITARY, THE NOTE REFERRED TO BUT DID NOT IDENTIFY TWO SUCH INSTANCES. FROTA'S NOTE ENDED BY STATING THAT HE HAD REQUESTED THE PROPER AUTHORITIES (IN THIS CASE THE JUSTICE MINISTRY) TO DETERMINE WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ALLEGED OFFENSES AND TO INSTITUTE LEGAL ACTION AGAINST THEM.

3. FROTA'S NOTE FOLLOWED BY TWO DAYS A NOTE ISSUED BY AIR MINISTER ARARIPE MACEDO, DENOUNCING A "PSYCHO-LOGICAL CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY" AIMED AT "SETTING PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES AND THE 1964 REVOLUTION." ARARIPE MACEDO SAID THAT THE ALLEGED RASH OF DEPRECATORY ARTICLES "CONSTITUTES AN ATTEMPT TO DEMORALIZE THE ARMED FORCES AND THE NATION'S SECURITY ORGANS." HIS NOTE SPECIFICALLY PROTESTED AN ARTICLE IN THE SEPTEMBER 3 EDITION OF JORNAL DO BRASIL WHICH REPORTED CLAIMS BY IMPRISONED FORMER TERRORIST MANOEL HENRIQUE FERREIRA'S THAT HE WAS TORTURED BY ARMY AND AIR FORCE OFFICERS AFTER HIS ARREST IN MAY 1971. NOTING THAT FERREIRA HAD BEEN CONVICTED OF VARIOUS CRIMES AND SENTENCED TO 57 YEARS IN JAIL, ARARIPE MACEDO ACCUSED THE PAPER OF "TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE LIBERTIES EXISTING IN BRAZIL."
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4. FYI: FERREIRA, A FORMER MEMBER OF THE MR-8 REVOLUTIONARY/ TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, WAS CONVICTED ON PARTICIPATING IN 12 ARMED ROBBERIES AND THE JUNE 1970 KIDNAPPING OF WEST GERMAN AMBASSADOR EHRENFRIED VON HOLLEBEN. IN JULY 1971, FERREIRA WAS SENTENCED TO 57 YEARS IN PRISON; SHORTLY THEREAFTER, HE APPEARED ON BRAZILIAN TELEVISION AND RENOUNCED AND CONDEMNED HIS REVOLUTIONARY PAST AND ASSOCIATES. THE SEPTEMBER 3 JB ARTICLE WHICH PROVOKED THE AIR MINISTRY NOTE WAS DRAWN LARGELY FROM A JANUARY 1976 RPT 1976 LETTER FROM FERREIRA TO SAO PAULO CARDINAL PAULO EVARISTO ARNS. IN HIS LETTER, FERREIRA ALLEGED THAT HE WAS TORTURED BY BOTH POLICE AND ARMY AND AIR FORCE OFFICERS (MANY OF WHOM HE CITED BY NAME AND RANK) AFTER HIS MAY 1971 ARREST; DURING PART OF THE TIME HE WAS BEING TORTURED, ACCORDING TO FERREIRA, HE WAS HELD IN THE AIR FORCE'S INFORMATION AND SECURITY CENTER IN THE AIR BASE AT RIO'S INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. END FYI.

5. FROTA'S NOTE ALLUDED TO THIS ARTICLE AND, MORE PERTI-NENTLY, TO A SEPTEMBER 1 FOLHA DE SAO PAULO COLUMN WHICH, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IN REFERRING TO THE DUKE OF CAXIAS, BRAZIL'S FOREMOST MILITARY HERO, SAID "THE PEOPLE ARE TIRED OF

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SWORDS AND HORSES. THEY URINATE ON HEROES ON PEDESTALS."
RESPONDING TO FROTA'S NOTE, THE JUSTICE MINISTRY ANNOUNCED ON
SEPTEMBER 10 THAT THE AUTHOR OF THE OFFENDING ARTICLE, FOLHA
COLUMNIST LOURENCO DIAFERIA, WOULD BE PROSECUTED UNDER THE
NATIONAL SECURITY LAW. OBSERVERS NOTED THAT JUSTICE
HAD THE ALTERNATIVE OF INITIATING ACTION UNDER THE LESS
STRINGENT PRESS LAW.

6. FROTA'S ACTION MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN PRECIPITATED BY A
STORY CONCERNING THE PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION,
ACCORDING TO WHICH PRESIDENT GEISEL, HAVING ALLEGEDLY
DECIDED THAT SNI CHIEF GENERAL JOAO BATISTA FIGUEIREDO WILL BE
HIS SUCCESSOR, HAD ASSIGNED FROTA TO VET FIGUEIREDO'S NAME
THROUGH THE ARMY HIGH COMMAND IN RETURN FOR THE AMBASSADORSHIP
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TO PORTUGAL DURING FIGUEIREDO'S ADMINISTRATION. THIS STORY,
ROUNDLY DENIED BY GEISEL POLITICAL SPOKESMEN, FIRST APPEARED
IN THE SEPTEMBER 1 ISSUE OF RIO'S TRIBUNA DA IMPRENSA;
SIGNIFICANTLY, THAT EDITION OF TRIBUNA, ONE OF THE FEW BRAZILIAN
PUBLICATIONS WHICH UNDERGOES PRIOR CENSORSHIP AND IS NORMALLY
HEAVILY CENSORED, WAS ALLOWED TO APPEAR WITHOUT ANY CHANGES OR
DELETIONS BY THE FEDERAL CENSORS. CONCURRENT WITH THE ISSUANCE
OF FROTA'S NOTE, FEDERAL POLICE OCCUPIED TRIBUNA'S OFFICES AND
PLANT AND FORBADE CIRCULATION OF THE PAPER'S SEPTEMBER 9 EDITION.

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 DHA-05 IO-13 /085 W
----------077433 131632Z /43
P R 131500Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3691
INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

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7. WHILE SOME ARENA SPOKESMEN APPLAUDED FROTA'S NOTE, POLITICAL AND PRESS REACTION HAS BEEN ESSENTIALLY CAUTIOUS. SOME MDB LEADERS AND MUCH OF THE PRESS, INCLUDING FOLHA, CAREFULLY EXPRESSED "SATISFACTION" THAT FROTA HAD RESPONDED TO THE ALLEGED OFFENSES VIA LEGAL RATHER THAN EXTRALEGAL MEANS. O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO, WHILE ADMITTING THE FROTA'S NOTE WAS A LEGITIMATE DEFENSE OF THE ARMY'S HONOR, STATED THAT IT IS THE PRESS' DUTY TO PUBLISH DENUNCIATIONS SUCH AS FERREIRA'S AND THAT THE ARMY MINISTER SHOULD ASK HIMSELF IF HE SUFFICIENTLY UNDERSTANDS THE ROLE AND MISSION OF THE PRESS. JORNAL DO BRASIL EDITORIALIZED ALONG SIMILAR LINES, BUT FOLHA LATER NOTED NERVOUSLY THAT THE PROSECUTION OF LOURENCO DIAFERIA WOULD PROBABLY NOT MOLLIFY THOSE WHO FELT THEIR SENSE OF DIGNITY OFFENDED. IN STRIKING CONTRAST, BUT NOT VISIBLY RELATED, TO THE TWO MINISTRY NOTES WAS SEPTEMBER 8 STATEMENT BY GENERAL DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO, II ARMY COMMANDER, PRAISING THE MEMBERS OF THE PRESS CORPS ATTACHED TO HIS HEADQUARTERS. SPEAKING IN ANTICIPATION OF THE SEPTEMBER 10 COMMEMORATION OF PRESS DAY, DILERMANDO THANKED THE PRESS FOR ITS POSITIVE COVERAGE OF THE SAO PAULO CEREMONIES MARKING SEPTEMBER 7.

8. COMMENT: THE EMBASSY HAS IN PREPARATION AN INTERPRETIVE
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MESSAGE WHICH REVIEWS RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND ANALYZES THEIR POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE. ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING DEVELOPMENTS HAS BEEN THE OPENNESS WITH WHICH POLITICAL DISCUSSION HAS BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS IN RECENT WEEKS. THERE HAVE BEEN HINTS, BUT NO MORE THAN THAT, THAT SOME MILITARY (AND SOME POLITICAL) ELEMENTS WERE BECOMING BOTH UNEASY AND UNHAPPY WITH THIS INCREASINGLY LIVELY EXPRESSION. THAT THERE WAS NO OUTWARD EVIDENCE OF REGIME DISSATISFACTION, HOWEVER, MIGHT HAVE EMBOLDENED, AT THE LEAST, A FEW REPORTERS AND/OR EDITORS TO TEST THE LIMITS OF MILITARY (OR REGIME) TOLERANCE.

9. THE FROTA AND ARARIPE WARNINGS--AND FROTA'S LEGAL ACTION GIVES THEM TEETH-WOULD SEEM TO BE ADDRESSED, THEN, NOT JUST TO THE PRESS BUT TO THE POLITICAL CLASS AS A WHOLE. THE MESSAGE IS A SIMPLE ONE: POLITICAL DISCUSSION IS ONE THING BUT AFFRONTS TO THE MILITARY INSTITUTION OR ANY OF ITS PARTS-- OR TO THE REGIME ITSELF--ARE QUITE ANOTHER. ARMA SOURCES INDICATE THAT FROTA'S STATEMENT WAS ISSUED WITH AT LEAST THE TACIT APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT.

10. FROTA'S WARNING MAY HAVE BEEN TIMED WIT SOMETHING ELSE IN MIND AS WELL: THE FORTHCOMING MDB NATIONAL CONVENTION, WHICH WAS RECENTLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY BROUGHT FORWARD FROM SEPTEMBER

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28 TO SEPTEMBER 14. THE MDB IS EXPECTED TO SEEK PARTY AGREE-
MENT TO A CALL FOR A NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY FOR SOME
TIME DURING 1979, AND HAS BEEN DRAFTING A DOCUMENT
WITH WHICH PUBLICLY TO LAUNCH SUCH A PLATFORM. THE REGIME,
THROUGH FROTA, MAY WELL BE CAUTIONING THE MDB TO CONDUCT ITS
PROCEEDINGS WITHIN BOUNDS IT CONSIDERS TOLERABLE.

11. WITH REGARD TO THE ONGOING POLITICAL DISCUSSION, ARENA
SPOKESMEN HAVE TAKEN PAINS TO DENY THAT IT WILL BE ADVERSELY
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AFFECTED BY FROTA'S ACTION. MDB SPOKESMEN HAVE CAUTIOUSLY
SAID THEY SEE NO REASON TO BE CONCERNED.
CRIMMINS

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